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DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, S/CT, INR/AA, DS/IP/AF, AND  
DS/TIA/ITA  
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/06/2020

TAGS: PTER PGOV PINR MOPS KCRM ASEC ML NG  
SUBJECT: NIGER: 17 DEAD IN CLASHES WITH MILITANTS NEAR  
MALI BORDER

REF: A. USDAO NIAMEY IIR 6 928 0023 10  
1B. NIAMEY 01018

Classified By: DCM Eric P. Whitaker, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) According to a January 4 communique of the Ministry of National Defense carried by Government-run "Tele Sahel Television," militants ambushed a Nigerian Armed Forces (FAN) responding from Tilia to a report of armed men on December 30 in Telemes, a small town located 95 km northwest of Tahoua, a regional capital, near the Malian border. After the assailants fled toward the village of Azindo, closer to the Malian border, reinforced Nigerien forces engaged the militants in the Langueri valley, with an eventual toll of 17 dead, including five members of the FAN, one National Gendarme, one National Force for Intervention and Security (FNIS) soldier, one civilian, and nine militants. The account also mentioned that authorities had seized a disabled vehicle, arms, and ammunition left behind.

12. (U) The story received front-page coverage in the January 5 issue of the Government-run daily newspaper "Le Sahel," as well as in "La Griffe," an independent newspaper that also called for a tri-state tracking force involving Algeria and Mali to tackle the growing menace of hostilities along the border area.

13. (S) Mission sources indicate that the disabled vehicle contained two passports, one Malian and one German, providing a linkage to Al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The second vehicle, tracked down subsequently by Nigerien security forces, contained the bodies of five of the deceased militants and three who had survived, who were taken into custody. Mission contacts note that perhaps four additional militants escaped, three into Mali and one in the Tilemese area.

14. (S) Nigerien Armed Forces suspect the militants were near Telemes on December 30 in preparation to raid the town on December 31, when it would have been full of goods and money on its weekly market day (ref A). Further reports indicate the raiding party was heavily armed, possessing long-range scopes for their weapons and bullet-proof vests. Contrary to previous engagements with armed men in the region, these assailants displayed an advanced level of training and coordination the initial responding unit did not anticipate. Although Mali agreed Nigerien units could pursue the assailants into Malian territory, Mali has done little to assist Niger in this matter.

15. (SBU) The event, which follows the December 28 killing of

four Saudi hunters and wounding of two others north of Tillabery (ref B), is further evidence of continuing insecurity along the Niger-Mali border area.

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